FRACTAL COMMUNITIES. Part three. Mo Felton.MSc.TSTA(P)

. Fractal communication chaos and rigidity.

Introduction

This is the last article in a series of three exploring the idea of fractal patterns in individuals and relationships which illustrate the continuance of Life Script (Berne 1972)

In the first paper *An Introduction to Fractal Communities* (Felton 2015) I outlined the idea of fractals as a never ending pattern that repeats itself at different scales, by which they mean for example of size, and also at different scales of relationship. The property is called self similarity and can be seen in snowflakes crystals and romanescu broccoli which are examples of fractals in nature. The second paper described the development of a matrix designed to aid residential social workers for developmental assessment of children in their care, reflective supervision, and integrating several TA models and theories with neuroscience. The Identity Matrix enables the user to identify fractals of script and the needed developmental relationships through several scales.

In this final paper I aim to draw together some key ideas which I hope the reader will explore further, mainly because I have discovered that ideas that have influenced me over a lifetime sometimes need detailed explanation and current research all of which are more suited to writing a book than an article, even if it is in three parts.

I am not sure I am up for writing a book, and no one warned me that writing might be as challenging as years of therapy, and for me it is. As I consider the challenges that emerged for me in my first attempts I recognise some fractals of experience that have influenced me since childhood.

A personal account.

. My most powerful memory is of a frequent experience between seven and ten years old in late 1950's post war Britain. I am sitting in an armchair watching early evening TV with my mother. She is preparing mountains of bread rolls with cheese and onion or roast meats ready to take to the social club my parents ran to sell to customers. My parents had a background in catering and hotel management. When the food was prepared Mum would get changed and go to the club which was a separate building to our detached house and connected by our smallholding. I was given instructions to turn off the TV and go to bed at nine pm. I was alone in the house till after midnight. I am amazed now that I never left the house even on summer nights when other children would be playing outside.

 I have always been a writer of sorts of letters to friends and magazines, a couple of short articles and essays for college, but I didn't go to university, and all my training and qualifications as an adult did not demand academic skills. The first time I needed

to do that was with the written exam for CTA when I was forty six, so this was quite a steep learning curve, and in the culture of that time I didn't expect I would ever have to do that again. Times change and as a trainer I decided to study for the MSc in Transactional Analysis. By this time I was beginning to question why I had such a struggle to write, I was sure that I was intelligent and had ideas I wanted to share but I procrastinated at each piece of writing. I used the Identity matrix to look at my behaviour, which persisted despite my Adult awareness that watching rubbish on TV would not get my writing done. Each time I left the writing to the deadline when my anxiety and scare of letting people down would get bad enough for me to ask for help from an I'm not ok position, and with help I would then be able to move my energy up to my thinking to write something I was satisfied with. Mindless watching TV, being alone, and getting scared were the fractals that led me to unmet needs initially at 6 – 18 months and corresponding stages that called for permission and protection from primary caretakers as foreground. I was repeating a rigid pattern of script that dictated I had to do this on my own, there was no one to ask for help and when you get scared, watching TV had a function to distract from and manage my anxiety. At eight to ten years old I needed help and encouragement with homework, permission to explore and I needed protection from my fears. There were other corresponding memories from before and after this time and each one holds the same fractals of self similarity of being locked into that rigid pattern and the result was that I never learned the skills needed for academic writing.

Of course I am also of a generation that had survived the devastation of war, where adults were focussed on building a new future through hard work and when girls were expected to get a nice secure office job until they got married and had babies so there were other cultural influences that meant I never considered university, but identifying the fractal or self similar pattern led me to an understanding and a solution I could choose in the here and now.

 For me one indicator that a scripted energy is in action is if there is a rigid adherence to rules models and values set long ago in a different context or culture. Eric Berne, in my opinion, was way ahead of his time. Current neuroscience is not only confirming some of his ideas but also our diagrams and theories offer an uncomplicated easy to grasp way of communicating complex ideas. . My own version of Life Positions, The Identity Matrix, works like a Christmas tree, the foundation map is there and I can then hang on to it many different theories and ideas, which all integrate into a coherent dynamic whole. (Felton.2015.). As you will see alongside TA I use the language of neuroscience, attachment theory and systems theory and in this paper Gestalt, Restorative Approach and Deep Democracy. All have ideas and concepts that either use a grid or fit onto it.

The Identity Matrix

The Identity Matrix was born out of necessity, to solve a problem. As described in the first paper in my role as consultant trainer supervisor to a local authority home for young people in care, my biggest challenge was to encourage reflective supervision in order to agree on a strategy for effective parenting. The nature of caring for young people inevitably raises elements of transference of all varieties (see Clarkson). Whilst we could, after some discussion, arrive at a parenting treatment plan for the child, the plan would sometimes break down when the child began to draw staff into their own experiences of un integrated and chaotic relational trauma which then inevitably resonated with the staff member's script. I often marvelled at the synchronicity of chosen member of staff and their "fit" with the needed role in the developing script of the child. Local authorities do not usually fund staff therapy and therefore the staffs defences would come into play. At that point all involved are in a chaotic and rigid system (Siegel. 2007) which transactional analysts know as Games(Berne.1964), and more specifically the Drama Triangle.(Karpman.1968) No amount of knowledge and understanding of the theory would intervene in that implicit early brain defence. For an example please see An Introduction to Fractal Communities (Felton 2015)

The Identity Matrix is a developmental map, initially to illustrate stages of child development, but also continuing or recycling (Levin.1982) development throughout life, it is also valuable as a self supervision matrix for individuals, couples and groups. By identifying relevant thinking feeling and behaviour it is possible to identify the fractal or parallel process in action, and also by referring to the child development map the original needed parenting and the current intervention or change required to increase options and therefore autonomy. In staff supervision this also enables the individual to discover what is transference from the child's historical experience and what belongs to the staff, often it is both.

In *The Science of the Art of Psychotherapy* neuroscientist Alan Schore quotes Leckman and March (2011,p.333) "our in utero and our early post natal interpersonal worlds shape and mold the individuals (infants, children, adolescents, and adults and caregivers) we are to become." He also reminds us of his 1996 proposal that "the self organisation of the developing brain occurs in the context of a relationship with another self, another brain." By identifying the fractals or patterns of self similarity for the child and the staff in the relationships between them we are able to choose the parenting interventions and staff support that meets the unmet needs. In my opinion this takes us to a problem solving ok-ok relationship and this allows the physis or life energy to flow more freely for growth and autonomy.

TA and community fractals.

Several years ago all staff in the authority I was contracted to were required to complete training in restorative approaches for young people. Restorative approaches are rooted in Restorative Justice and the main focus is on restoring relationships where there is conflict and preventing harm. This approach has been used successfully in prisons between offender and victim and also in schools and children's homes to repair and restore relationships. The staff I worked with returned from the training full of contempt for what was to them theories and practices that they were already using and trained in, namely Transactional Analysis by another name. I joined them in the protest that yet again no one was recognising our work and the effectiveness of our practice with young people. As each group returned

from training the protests of being discounted got louder, and as I reflect on those discussions now I can recognise the sense of injustice and a kind of isolated superiority of being the odd ones out, the different home to the rest. We were a bit like an exclusive club with a secret language. It seemed other homes staff either envied us or ridiculed and dismissed the TA. I was aware of the level of discount and suggested some ways of sharing our knowledge with others, but none of these ever came to fruition, so we carried on doing an excellent job in glorious seclusion. After a difficult period of difference and conflict in the staff team I was asked to prepare a team day to mark a new beginning and to meet with the RA team of trainers to integrate the TA with RA. the two main models used for conflict resolution in the home.

At last, I was to get an opportunity to establish ownership of the TA models. However that was not what happened. In short, the founder of the training organisation, Belinda Hopkins was an engaging and dynamic international trainer, author and speaker, and what's more, without knowing anything about the OK corral (Ernst 1971) she was clearly centred in I'm okay –You're okay.

She invited me to present a workshop on TA at her next RA conference in Birmingham and was fascinated to hear about TA. I was not only excited to be presenting to people new to TA but also intrigued by the similarity of some of our concepts and theories. I became less interested in who was the originator of the theories and more interested in integrating the models to co create more than the sum of the parts. Over the next few years I was able to present a number of workshops and presentations on RA and TA and recently contributed a chapter on TA in an RA book, *Restorative Theory in Practice (Hopkins. 2015.)* which brings together ten different modalities and theories as applied to restorative practice and was inspired and edited by Belinda Hopkins.

In my own analysis I see that as a team our original position on the matrix was "TA is okay and RA is not okay." This was a rigid system of believing we were one up or superior to RA and RA trainers. I do my best to practice what I preach so I was willing and able to take the opportunity to confront what I believed was a discount and I was very pleasantly surprised. The result for me and for TA was opportunity to present at their conference and at a TA conference on how TA and RA models are mutually beneficial and most of all I got a first opportunity to be an author. This was a huge challenge for me and took an enormous amount of persistence and patience from my mentors and the editor, and it was achieved. I understand this has been part of the reason I was nominated for and awarded a UKATA medal this year and I suspect has influenced the decision of EATA scientific team to accept my proposal to deliver a paper at the upcoming Geneva conference.

My decision to tackle what I thought was a discount of TA by another modality using what I thought were TA theories and models has resulted in a gift to myself that keeps on giving. Who knows what may come from Geneva?

Fractals in the TA community.

Over the years of my involvement with TA I have noticed that one of the fractals of similarity in our community is possibly how we deal with difference and conflict. Ask yourself now, if you have been involved in or witnessed a difference between trainees, therapists, colleagues even organisations where there has been no satisfactory resolution but resulted in distancing judgements criticism and competition for who is right and who is wrong? This is rigid energy and can only result in bad feeling. It does not promote an OK-OK frame. Instead of seeking resolution the differences are not openly talked about. This results in a situation that reminds me of what Kerri Phillips in his recent conference paper describes as undiscussable undiscussability. (Phillips.K. 2016)

There is no creativity or growth in this rigid pattern, and no integration of old with new. Dan Siegel says that mental health is integration and having a clear narrative of our history is healing of past trauma etc. That is so for the individual and I say it is also true for relationships and our community. The fractal patterns can emerge through several scales of relationship and even through generations.

. When I think of Eric being refused admission to the San Francisco psychoanalytic institute twice I think it will have had a devastating effect on his confidence. What should he do? Over adapt and comply or move to a one up position of "Watch me now"? We know what he did, and I think it was the best decision for him and TA at that time, but maybe we are still operating at that level which was right in that context but is now not serving us well. The "glorious seclusion" of my experience in the children's home I see as a fractal of Berne's experience of being excluded from the psychoanalytic community and deciding to go it alone with TA and his small group of followers. This pattern may be still repeating all over the world and if so my question for us all is how do we bring this into awareness and understanding in order to change and shift our collective energy to ++ and creative growth with others?

Case Study.

On an individual developmental level in the first instance, when a parent stops the toddler from taking power and consequently holds him dependant the outcome for the child may be adaptation or rebellion. In the latter I think this is what we would now know as premature autonomy.(Siegel.2012) The following is a composite case study to illustrate this pattern.

Sally entered therapy when her relationship broke down. She was a successful businesswoman and owned property here and abroad. During our early exploration of her childhood it emerged that she had suffered a life threatening heart condition from birth and had undergone several operations to save her life. Her parents had been terrified of losing Sally and for much of her childhood had overprotected her. There were family stories of how despite her illness as a toddler Sally had taken risks like climbing high walls and how anxious this had made her Mum. Now as an adult she was repeating a pattern of being unwilling to be vulnerable or dependant in a relationship as she maintained her position of being in control. There were several examples throughout her childhood where she had taken this one up position, the fractal or similar experience that maintained her script was her reaction to the look of terror on her mother's face probably in the first weeks of life and certainly during her first attempts at separating as a toddler. She "decided" that she had to take charge of her own life but this was too early in her development and she missed an experience

of learning to do things in a protective and permission giving relationship at 6-18 months, and also she missed the journey of becoming powerful in her own right because her move to a powerful controlling self was a defence against the fear of her non survival communicated by the fear on mothers face. Now as an adult she had been unable to allow herself to be vulnerable in her relationship.

Alternatively she might just as well have over adapted to her mother's terror and become an anxious dependent child through to being a victim in relationships. The point is her development and life force were interrupted and a rigid system was in place. In TA we might describe this as a racket or script system.

When someone has defended themselves with premature autonomy they are very often successful powerful people in a position of authority as adults. An important assurance they will need to hear is that they will not lose the skills they have acquired by reclaiming vulnerability and integrating this experience with a powerful self. Often they fear losing a job or business because the idea of vulnerability carries with it a fear of non survival held in the early brain and the limbic system.

I'm OK – You're OK.

I think there is a misconception of what this life position really means. This is not just a belief but a dynamic expression of thinking feeling and behaviour. Simply believing everyone is ok and then being unwilling to address difference and oppression in our lives and the lives of others is in my assessment an I'm not ok - You're not ok position, known also as the bystander (Clarkson. 1992). Of course living our lives from I'm ok – You're ok integrated Adult state is an ideal and it's not possible to take action on every single misuse of power, difference or oppression that touches our lives, we all have to choose the issues we pay attention to. In my own internal matrix those issues that result in strong feelings cause me to seek to connect with others in order to problem solve. This would include those differences where my starting position is one up to the other which is often called confrontation. Confrontation is fine so long as the confronter is willing to hear the other person's response and account the possibility that there is more to the story than my personal reaction and interpretation. I may have to acknowledge that I have misinterpreted the actions or intentions of the other. I may have to acknowledge that I was wrong and possibly change my own opinions and beliefs. Confrontation from a rigid belief of my own rightness and your fault will be likely to reinforce difference conflict and a rigid frame. Deep democracy which is an aspect of Process work and particularly 'Worldwork' is rooted in Jungian Transpersonal psychology, and offers ideas and practices for dealing with such conflicts and differences in large groups. See the work of Arnold Mindell. (1995)

Community and children's homes.

In the first paper on community I gave an example of how the local community around the home was reflecting the fractal pattern of *Sam's* experience (Felton2015). The community held certain beliefs about children who were in care. For generations, in some areas, parents have used the threat of going into care to discipline their children. The general view of children in care has been that they are bad, unruly, dangerous, and will lead you into trouble. They are naughty kids. For individual members of a community the prejudice is firmly located in different expressions of Parent ego state and the fear engendered by the threat to the Child . I don't intend to open that out on this occasion. However for some individuals in the

community their internal process is that of conditioned fear of kids in care and their closed belief system demanding they keep a distance in case they are contaminated by badness and rejected. When *Sam's* behaviour started to escalate, this closed rigid system of beliefs thinking feelings and options for behaviour locked into place resulting in demands that we get rid of him. For some maybe traces of epigenetic inheritance, possibly reaching back to the trauma of the workhouse.

In order to address the community reaction to *Sam* and open up the system to a creative energy it was necessary to start right at the beginning .We understood that people in the community had some real fears and intrusions into their lives as a result of *Sam's* behaviour causing them to feel like victims (I- U+) so people needed information and to know options for protection. Some had moved to defend themselves in persecutor (I+ U-) and they needed to have their anger accounted. Prior to addressing those needs we needed to move first to an approach of I+U+. If we look at the needs of a newborn infant a central aspect is that the parent shows interest curiosity and positive stimulation to the infant to invite him or her into relationship. Good intent for the care and wellbeing of the infant instils an experience of "good in the world" (Moiso.1984). In this approach to the community representatives engaging in self similar or fractals of the developmentally needed relationship for new beginnings was central. Management and staff demonstrated openness, contact warmth and an invitation into a new relationship with the home and its staff and residents. They made time and space to hear and respond with sensitivity to the anger and the fears of neighbours. They offered information that addressed anxieties and demonstrated the levels of protection and holding for everyone involved from *Sam* through to staff and the community. They invited members of the community to be more involved and therefore maybe recognise that some of their prejudices and fears were either exaggerated or unfounded. However this was by no means a "perfect new baby". Some conditioning was too well entrenched, and some issues took us to an I-U- frame of there being some things neither I can change nor you But the relationships developed enough to enable changes at other levels for staff and ultimately for *Sam* .We created more options for change development and growth and nobody was rejected or got rid of, because even when there were differences that we could not resolve we stayed in the contact and open communication of an I+U+ relationship.

Conclusion.

I hope that this last paper in the trilogy has caused you the reader to have more questions than it provides answers. I am very open to communicating with you about your responses including differences. Questions are the gateway to knowledge and enable growth and development. I believe that Transactional Analysis can be a central element in the integration of different modalities into a coherent new identity for psychotherapy and change work. By connecting more intimately with other approaches to share knowledge and honour differences will I think produce more than the sum of the parts, and enable TA to continue to develop and shape a future world. Rather a grand goal you may say, but I don't see this as my goal, I experience this as an emerging energy from the collective unconscious (Jung. 1929) received by many to bring about change. Like Widdowson in his recent Conference speech I

know we have much to be proud of, and also that it is time to update much of the culture of TA and take the courage to "be the change you want to see in the world."

I close with a couple of quotes from Carl Gustav Jung.

"Loneliness does not come from having no people about one, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding views which others find inadmissible".

"The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed"

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